

Copy of Letters

To Prof. Ripley of Newton



17

Boston June 27th 1837.

Mr. Ripley

Dear Sir

I yesterday went to Lynn & called upon Mr. Collins, & am now prepared to give you the state of the case in regard to the woman Clarissa.

Mr. Collins assured me, in the presence of William Bassett of Lynn, Clerk of the Friends Meeting in New England & a young of the first respectability, that Clarissa could have her freedom if she wished it & remain here or return with them as she chose; & further that if Abram came here she also ~~should~~ remain, as he never would separate them, whether they remained here or at the South. At the same time he assured us that she did not wish her freedom, that she preferred to return with them, & that she and Abram both had rather live at the South, than come here. He complained of the efforts made, as he said, "to get her away clandestinely," alluding I supposed to the private in-

interviews that had been held with her on the subject, & I accordingly remarked to him (what I know to be the fact) that, as he knew very well that slaves were very generally not in the habit of speaking out their real feelings, especially on the question of their freedom, in the presence of their masters, these private interviews had been held with Clarissa merely to get at her real feelings in the case. I added further, that although she might, out of love to her husband & attachment to her mistress, prefer to return, her husband remaining there, we believed that were her husband here she would wish to remain - all which he did not seem to question.

As to the interviews with Clarissa, these as I have said, were held, not for the purpose of getting her away clandestinely, but merely to get at her real feelings in the case. At these interviews she has uniformly held one language, that she had rather be free than a slave, that the inducement which decides her to return is her husband, that if he were here she would remain, & that she prefers freedom with her husband here, to slavery with her husband at the South. I was so occupied on Saturday that I could not go to Lynn until just

at night. I arrived between six & seven & in the evening saw Clarissa at the house of a friend. On informing her that I had seen you, & that you would send for Abram, if she chose to remain, she gave me the same assurances that she had before given others & that I have mentioned above. She seemed however to have been fully educated in the false morality of slavery, & expressed a wish that her mistress would consent to her remaining, as she felt it would be hardly right to do so, unless she did; & when assured that Master & mistress both had said repeatedly she could remain here & be free, if she chose, she said, they said so to us, but not to her, & that they were really unwilling ~~to have~~ that she should leave them, but that whether they gave their consent to her or not, she would remain if her husband came. Such I believe is the true state of the case. I did not call on Mr. Collins on Saturday Evening, because it was 9 o'clock when our interview with Clarissa closed, & I had to return to the city that night, & besides I thought it better to see him on Monday.

And now dear Sir, permit me to say, that I hope you send for Abram immediatly. If you know aught of the influence of slavery on the mind of the slave, you will readily understand the why & the wherefore of the different language held by the woman to us & to her master. And besides, if the love of husband & wife has made them hitherto kiss their chains & encounter the fearful liabilities of slavery, rather than be separate, why should not the same tender attachments be now appealed to, to wake them up to the fearfulness of their condition, both for time & eternity, to new create, if they are now destitute of it, a sense of their high responsibilities as immortal beings, & to lead them to the better choice of freedom, with its high hopes & glorious opportunities, & in the enjoyment of which, to whatever other liabilities they may be exposed, that of separation is not among them? Nay more, were they both at this moment here, & should they both, if the question were now submitted to them, choose to return into slavery, who does not know that such a choice would only show the havoc which slavery has made of the immortality within them? And if, with the atmosphere of slavery still around

them, & its benumbing influence & withering effects
still upon them, such were their choice, why
should not both be, not only brought, but
kept in the atmosphere of freedom & taught to
breathe its vital air & drink its living waters
until there shall have been a resurrection of
the immortality within them, & they having
learned what freedom is, shall make the better
choice, or if they barter their birthright for pot-
-tage, shall do it with their eyes open, knowing
what they do? But I will not enlarge — I trust,
now that the opportunity offers, you will not
fail to see to it that Abram, by being brought
here, is put in circumstances, in which his
choice in the case, will no longer be one of
ignorance, nor the choice of evils, but one of
intelligence & freedom. And therefore, were it my
case, I should feel myself solemnly bound not
to submit the question to Abram there & take his
decision there, but to bring out of the prison house
of slavery, to explain to him fully the reasons
why he should choose to be free, rather than
a slave, to lay before all the liabilities of the one
condition & the advantages & liabilities of the other,

, both to himself & his posterity - in one word, believing as I do, that it is not only his right, but his solemn duty to be free, I would see him fully instructed on the point, before I called on him to decide the question, & ~~I do not see~~ could not, nor do I see how you can answer it to your conscience or your God if you fail to do so.

Will you write me, as soon as convenient, what you decide to do in the case. Clarissa wishes you would send for him at once. Mr. Collins married, recently, the Miss Mc Kay, of which you spoke. Mr. C. says that Clarissa has worked out for herself the two past years, but has not supported herself. That Abram & his wife may soon be free, & that you & all concerned may enjoy the luxury of feeling that you have done your duty to them is the fervent prayer of -
Yours truly
A. A. Phelps.

P.S. I will simply add, that Mr. James Buffum, one of the gentlemen whose letter I read you, is a Carpenter, has several men in his employ, & says he will take Abram & find him employment on good terms.

Should Abram therefore come immediately, he & his wife could be together at once, & if, if she chose, could at the same time remain with Mr. & Mrs. C. till their return.